

Noel Siley

African Rice and the “Sources Exchange”

In the academic journal, “African Rice in the Columbian Exchange” Judith A. Carney explores the African’s role in the spreading of rice in the Columbian Exchange. Carney argues that many documents written on the Columbian Exchange are inaccurate when it comes to the spread of rice cultivation to the new world and across other nations. In a lot of the original documents on the exchange, the africans involvement in certain crops and advanced knowledge of how to plant these crops, were downplayed. Carney used a surplus of sources to try and prove her stance on the involvement of african’s in the spread of rice. However, many of her sources are secondary and mostly from the 1900s. Carney doesn’t include many documents that specifically state that African rice was the first rice cultivated in the Americas, instead, she’ll use many secondary sources to try and connect them to one possibility based on the circumstantial evidence. Carney despite having many sources at her disposal, seems to not support her statement very well throughout the journal, as a lot of the sources aren’t relevant to her topic, or the sources themselves aren’t reliable. All in all, Carney does make some good points here and there, but the evidence to support her points are weak and doesn’t help her goal.

While looking through Carney’s sources we can tell that a lot of her documents mainly come from the 1900s, there are no original documents from the time period of the Columbian Exchange, and there are no recent accounts of these studies. However, that last statement may be attributed to the fact that she published this in 2001. Carney is working with a difficult topic as a lot of the accomplishments made by africans in rice cultivation wasn’t recorded during those times. Many of the slaves of that time may have been illiterate or not have been able to record events due to the oppression from their slave owners. Carney also tends to use her own works to

support her claims throughout this piece. This becomes an issue because these were one of the sources that appeared multiple times in Carney's journal. This may make her opinion to seem biased and not truly justified.

One of the sources that may bring Carney's credibility into question is actually from a gentleman's magazine. The source is referred to as, "Of the introduction of rice and tar in our colonies" by P. Collison, published in 1766 by the Gentleman's Magazine. One red flag about this source is that it's a secondary source, taken from a primary source. Now, this source becomes doubtful because we don't know where the primary source is from and how well does the secondary source uphold the findings from the primary source. This source also backs up a huge statement that Carney makes. Carney basically states that this document proves that South Carolina received one of its initial deliveries of rice in the 1690s. Moreover, the Columbian Exchange took place during the 1490s-1500s and this article in a magazine was published about 200 years later. This questions how accurate the information can be, if the event they're discussing happened years ago. Despite this source not being that impactful throughout Carney's entire work, it still raises eyebrows at the sources Carney used to support her claim.

Another issue found in this academic journal, is Carney's use of her past works to support her current work. For example, in the source "Judith A. Carney, 'Landscapes of technology transfer: Rice cultivation and African continuities', *Technology and Culture*, (1996)" she uses this source to support a big statement in that section. In this section Carney explains why it'll be reasonable to believe that African slaves established the cultivation of rice in South Carolina, due to the similar environments of South Carolina and West Africa. She also states how the techniques of the africans would be more preferred over the techniques of the Asian's in growing

and harvesting the rice. The major issue with this source is that she had used it twice to support some major points in her journal. Carney is also evaluating her own work, so despite not trying to set a precedence of bias, this citation can still be seen as her being biased. The knowledge is based on her work and it could very much be that there are some flaws in her work.

Carney also seems to have a problem with staying to the main topic of african rice in the Columbian Exchange as she adds in a lot of unnecessary topics to fill up her work and sources. For example the source, " Mark Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds*(New York, 1999), 5-15.", is used to talk about the methods of preparing coffee in Ethiopia and the spread of coffee seedlings to other countries. This source seems to be out of place because the main focus is supposed to be on how African slaves actually had a big role in the cultivation of rice in the americas. This whole section that Carney implemented into this academic journal really didn't supply much information to further Carney's agenda and could've been excluded. Additionally, Carney ends up dedicating pages 392-394 to discuss the other crops that Africans helped to introduce to other questions. In this section, it seems as if Carney used this information exclusively to fill in more pages and to add up her source count. This is because these crops don't really have any significance to the riziculture brought over to the new world. What makes this section even worse, is that Carney just ends up listing these crops. She doesn't really explain how the africans introduced these crops or how these crops actually connect to the whole topic of rice cultivation in the americas.

In conclusion, Carney does present an interesting statement that we don't actually know how much african slaves helped in the cultivation of rice in the americas. But, she lacks the substantial and factual evidence that will affirm that this statement is true. Despite Carney

making statements that could very well be true, she fails on her sources to bolster these statements. With a high usage of her own sources to support her and the usage of sources that don't have much to do with the overall topic of african rice in the columbian exchange, Carney's claim can not be validated.

WORD COUNT: 1067

Work Cited

Carney, Judith A. "African Rice In The Columbian Exchange." *The Journal of African History*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2001, pp. 377–396., doi:10.1017/s0021853701007940.

Pendergrast, Mark. *Uncommon Grounds: the History of Coffee and How It Transformed Our World*. Basic Books, 1999.

Judith A. Carney, 'Landscapes of technology transfer: Rice cultivation and African continuities', *Technology and Culture*, (1996)